

2.8. Human rights defenders

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: April 2022

This profile refers to persons who individually and in association with others, act to promote or protect human rights and fundamental freedoms.[\[11\]](#)

COI summary

Already in past years, journalists, media workers, commentators and human rights defenders were targeted by anti-government armed groups as well as by former State actors, warlords, powerful local figures, and organised criminal groups [[COI query on journalists, media workers and human rights defenders](#); [Conflict targeting](#), 1.2.9, 1.5.1, 2.3].

Human rights defenders' work can be considered dangerous throughout Afghanistan because human rights are often seen as an alien, Western or a non-Islamic concept. Intimidation, harassment, threats and violence against human rights defenders and activists by both the former authorities and by anti-government elements have been documented. In particular civil society representatives 'who express opinions and monitor and report on human rights violations and abuses' encountered an 'environment of threat and intimidation' attributable to both insurgents and state actors [[COI query on journalists, media workers and human rights defenders](#); [State structure](#), 1.8.1; [Conflict targeting](#), 1.2.9, 1.5.1, 2.3].

Analysts commented on the increase in targeted killings of journalists women's rights activists and other members of civil society in the winter of 2020-2021, noting that the insurgents were 'pre-emptively targeting independently-minded 'public intellectuals' [[Security September 2021](#), 1.4.3].

After the takeover, Taliban reportedly conducted door-to-door targeted searches looking for activists, raids on offices of some NGOs and civil society groups. Raids on women-led NGOs were also reported and, in some cases, they confiscated their vehicles and sealed their offices. Also, the Taliban reportedly had lists of persons that have worked with foreigners or as social activists, and a list of 25 high-profile women from Herat, that included civil society activists. There were also reports about the assassination of a female women's rights activist and a nurse by the Taliban, by shooting her in the forehead in her own house. A female women's rights activist and lecturer was also found shot dead in the city of Mazar-e Sharif, after she went missing on 20 October. Beatings and detention of protesters, including activists and human rights defenders, by Taliban fighters, were reported during demonstrations that took place in September in Faizabad City in Badakhshan province and Kapisa [[Country Focus 2022](#), 2.7].

Risk analysis

The acts to which individuals under this profile could be exposed are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution (e.g. killing, detention, beatings).

In the case of human rights defenders, a well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.

Nexus to a reason for persecution

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion and/or religion.

[11] See UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/53/144 adopting the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (annex I), available at <https://undocs.org/A/RES/53/144>, as well as European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, available at https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu_guidelines_hrd_en.pdf.